

Securing Sydney's food supply

The Bells Line Expressway will ease pressure on important agricultural lands in the Sydney Basin and provide an efficient access route to agricultural precincts close to Sydney.

The Bells Line Expressway will protect valuable food production land on the urban fringe.



How important is Sydney Basin agriculture?

There is no doubt that the Sydney Basin is an important contributor to fresh food production in NSW. When compared to state production levels, Sydney produces a large proportion of many perishable vegetables - 91 percent of NSW's Asian vegetables, 90 percent of parsley, 82 percent of mushrooms, 76 percent of capsicum and chillies and 70 percent of cucumbers (Sinclair, 2009).

Within the Sydney Basin, the South West and North West Growth Centres are important production areas, accounting for 50 percent of Sydney's vegetable growing enterprises and 60 percent (by area) of Sydney's greenhouse vegetable industry (Malcolm and Fahd, 2009).

Nevertheless, Sydney Basin agriculture is declining. The area of land planted to vegetables in the Hawkesbury LGA has declined from 1400 ha in 1997 to 482 ha in 2009 (Malcolm and Fahd). The number of farms has declined by 58 percent in that time. Malcolm and Fahd suggest that about 85 percent of the vegetables consumed in Sydney originate from outside the Sydney region, much of it coming from Queensland or Victoria. In part, this is a consequence of the growing pressures on Sydney Basin land.

What are the pressures on Sydney's food basin?

ABS projections for population growth highlight enormous growth in the south west and north west regions of Sydney out to 2036, with the south west's population more than doubling in this time. (NSW Department of Planning, 2010).

The price of agricultural land in the Sydney Basin is rising, making it more attractive for farmers to sell their land for residential development than to farm their land. As a result, Sydney's agricultural production areas are becoming

highly fragmented, and interspersed with residential areas (Sinclair, 2009).

Fragmentation and small scale - what are the problems?

- Long term economic viability of individual farms tends to be reduced as area under cropping is reduced.
- An inappropriate mix of land uses results in issues of spray drift, noise and odour affecting neighbours and could potentially lead to the need to curtail operations.
- Small scale operations make it hard to adopt labour saving mechanisation and more environmental / sustainable agricultural practices (Malcolm and Fahd)

Additionally, access to the limited water supplies of the Sydney Basin at a reasonable price may be a factor limiting the potential expansion and productivity of vegetable farms in the Basin (Malcolm and Fahd).

The impact of housing development

"More than 50 percent of Sydney's identified vegetable growing enterprises are in the proposed Southern and North West Growth Centres i.e. areas earmarked for subdivision"

(Malcolm and Fahd)

Housing development in these areas could have major consequences for food production in the Sydney region:

- The number of vegetable farms could fall by more than 50 percent
- The area producing greenhouse vegetables could fall by as much as 60 percent (Malcolm and Fahd)

The NSW State Government asks “should more be done to encourage food production in the Sydney Basin?”

(NSW Department of Planning, 2010)

Answer: Yes

Malcolm and Fahd report that agricultural production in Sydney is much less significant than many other commentators believe it to be. As a consequence, supply to the Sydney region is vulnerable to oil price shocks and climatic impacts.

Maintaining food production in the Sydney Basin to supply the large coastal metropolitan areas will keep food miles down, reducing exposure to high oil prices, thus keeping prices lower.

As witnessed in recent times, the vagaries of Australia's weather patterns can have significant impacts on food production across the nation. Maintaining an adequate supply of locally produced vegetables is, therefore, imperative for the Sydney community.

Sydney Basin agriculture has many advantages:

- Proximity to a large market
- Ability to respond quickly to price signals
- Long-term resilience through access to off-farm income opportunities in the Sydney labour market (Malcolm and Fahd)

Should more be done to encourage food production in close proximity to the Sydney Basin?

Answer: Yes

Food production in close proximity to Sydney including to the north, south and the west should be further developed. Efficient transport links are critical to this development. They already exist to the north and south but are deficient in the west.

This development will be important in securing Sydney's food supply in the face of substantial population growth and in the event that the impacts of climate change and oil price rises make other production areas less viable.

How will building the Bells Line Expressway help?

By alleviating pressure on the Sydney Basin's agricultural lands:

Building the Bells Line Expressway should alleviate pressure on the north west and south west agricultural lands of the Sydney Basin by encouraging a greater migration of people and businesses from Sydney to regional centres over the Blue Mountains. This will reduce the need for residential developments to encroach on the Basin's agricultural lands. Information Sheet 1 provides further detail on the expected population pressures on the Sydney Basin.

The Bells Line Expressway will make regional centres in the Central West of NSW more attractive as a place to live and do business because it will:

- enhance the Central West region's attractiveness as a tourist destination
- enable considerable industry growth and job creation for the Central West region through improved transport links and economic integration
- allow those migrating to the Central West to retain connections to the Sydney region through improved transport links

(WRI, 2005)

By providing an efficient access route to agricultural precincts to the west of Sydney:

Improving access and transport links to the Central West and beyond will enable further development of agricultural precincts in close proximity to Sydney beyond the Blue Mountains.



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